implementation with a view to reduce transaction time and cost of selling and/or buying of tea through auction, ensuring competition in auction system, enhancing the speed of auction to handle maximum volume and faster disposal of tea etc.

(ii) Introduction of electronic auction to ensure greater transparency.

Closure of tea gardens

167. SHRI K. CHANDRAN PILLAI: Will the Minister of COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that a large number of tea gardens have been closed/abandoned in various parts of the country during the last three years;

(b) if so, the details thereof, State-wise;

(c) the number of workers rendered unemployed due to the closure;

(d) whether Government have provided any relief package to the affected workers;

(e) whether Government propose any comprehensive Plan to service the plantation sector; and

(f) if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY (SHRI E.V.K.S. ELANGOVAN): (a) and (b) Yes, Sir. During the last three years, 96 tea gardens spread over West Bengal, Kerala, Assam and Tripura have been closed of which 41 tea gardens have since been reopened. The balance 55 tea gardens still remain closed at present. State-wise details of the closed tea gardens are given below:—

Name of the State	Total number of tea gardens closed during the last three years	Number of gardens re-opened	Number of gardens that remain closed at present
West Bengal	50	29	21
Kerala	22	05	17
Assam	17	06	11
Tripura	07	01	06
TOTAL:	96	41	55

(c) Total number of workers unemployed due to closure of the tea gardens is 28,195.

(d) The Plantations Labour Act, 1951 provides for the welfare of plantation labour and regulates the conditions of work in plantations, including tea. This act is administered by the State Governments and it specifies the various facilities to be provided to the workers. Government of India had taken up the matter regarding the problems being faced by the workers of the tea gardens with the concerned State Governments for intervention and providing necessary relief. Some State Governments like West Bengal and Kerala, where the number of closed tea gardens are more, have taken steps to provide relief to the affected plantation workers and their families. This include creation of employment opportunities through various schemes, extending health care, implementing nutritior programmes for children, distribution of foodgrains, augmenting drinking water facilities and distribution of cash to the most needy.

(e) and (f) The plantation crops mainly tea and coffee have been affected due to the fall in prices during the last few years. A number of steps have been taken to help the tea and coffee growers. So far as tea is concerned, a package of Special Tea Term Loan (STTL) has been announced recently which envisages restructuring/rephasing of outstanding term/working capital loans in the tea sector with repayment over 5 to 7 years and a moratorium of 1 year. The STTL also provides for working capital upto Rs. 2 lakhs at a rate not exceeding 9% to small growers. The Government has issued orders regarding implementation of a Price Subsidy Scheme for small tea growers for a period of four months from February to May 2004. Tea Board is also implementing a price sharing formula between small tea growers and manufacturers of made tea *w.e.f.* 1.4.2004. A special fund has also been set up out of collections by way of additional duty of excise of Re. 1 per kg. on tea for the development, modernisation and rehabilitation of tea plantation sector. In order to mitigate the problems of coffee growers, Government of India has taken a series of steps which include re-phasement/restructuring of loans taken by the coffee growers from commercial banks by way of Special Coffee Term Loan (SCTL), interest subsidy to small and large coffee growers on the repayment of working capital loans taken from financial institutions, reduction in import duty on specified machinery for coffee sector to 5% to enable the industry to improve the quality and productivity of coffee for making it globally competitive. Commercial Banks have also agreed to extend crop loans upto a maximum of Rs. 50 lakhs at 9% interest so as to benefit the coffee gorwers having land holdings upto 60 ha. In addition, the Coffee Board is implementing a medium-term export strategy to sustain and gain market share in the key markets and also to improve the competitiveness of Indian coffee in the global markets over the next few years.

The Government of India has also set up a Price Stabilization Fund with a corpus of Rs. 500 crore for the benefit of tea, coffee, rubber and tobacco growers.

Industrial package for Himachal Pradesh

†168. SHRI SURESH BHARDWAJ: Will the Minister of COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY be pleased to state:

(a) the concessions to be given for setting up industries in Himachal Pradesh under the industrial package given by Government;

(b) whether the proposals for setting up of Industries have been invited by the State Government from the industries which are to be benefited under this scheme;

(c) the number of proposals received by the State Government for setting up of new industries under this scheme after getting the above package; and

(d) if so, the details of the steps taken by the State Government?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY (SHRI E.V.K.S. ELANGOVAN): (a) The Government announced a package of economic incentives on 07.01.2003 for promoting industrialization in the State of Himachal Pradesh. The economic incentives envisaged in the package, *inter-alia,* include 100% income tax exemption for initial period of five years and thereafter 30% for companies and 25% for other than companies for a further period of five years, 100% excise exemption; Capital Investment Subsidy @ 15% for investment in plant and machinery subject to a maximum of Rs. 30 lakh, etc.

(b) to (d) The State Government is giving wide publicity among the entrepreneurs through advertisements in the leading industrial print media about the package of incentives available for industrial units in Himachal Pradesh. The State Government also regularly interacts with industrialists through apex Industry Associations like Punjab, Haryana, Delhi Chamber of Commerce and Industry (PHDCCI), Confederation of Indian Industry (CII), etc. After the announcement of the Package, Government of Himachal Pradesh, till 30th June 2004, has received 2570 proposals for setting up of new industries in the small scale sector and 327 proposals for setting up of new industries in the medium and large scale sector.

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†Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.